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#BREAKING

Social News Curation during Acute Events

Before the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave of citizen media settled into a role as second-tier media providing a control and corrective on the mainstream media, the hope had been that they might become vehicles for original, first-hand news reporting. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, however, the considerable barriers to regular newsgathering and reporting that remained in this first wave proved too high to allow for the establishment of sustainable citizen reporting platforms—such ambitions were realised only occasionally in short-term contexts (such as *Indymedia*'s 1999 effort in Seattle), or when facilitated by mainstream news organisations (for instance in the form of CNN's iReport project or the BBC UGC Hub). Overall, citizens never managed to 'become the media' to the extent that they could find sustainable models to replace the full breadth of mainstream media functions.

But citizens regularly did play crucial roles as eyewitness reporters during major breaking news events, at least when such events took place in highly populated areas—and in some such cases, "citizen journalism on blogs or public contributor sites like YouTube offered better access than was afforded professional journalists" (Kaufhold *et al.* 2010: 517c). Major international events that generated such citizen reportage during the first wave of citizen media

included the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 7 July 2005 bombing attacks in London, or the 2005 hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and surrounding areas, but a range of events of less substantial impact also highlighted the potential inherent in citizen reporting to news organisations in various national and local media environments. Indeed, as Allan reports, the London bombings experience led directly to the establishment of the BBC UGC Hub as a long-term effort to harness citizen reporting (Allan 2013: 167).

Such natural disasters and terrorist attacks, along with other unforeseen and suddenly emerging developments, belong to a category that Burgess and Crawford (2011) have described as "acute events": they are, "at least at their initial occurrence, spontaneous and not managed by officials within institutional settings" (Livingston and Bennett 2003: 364–65), and generate "event-driven news" (364)—rapidly unfolding news stories that only gradually crystallise into a clear picture of the situation, pieced together from a multitude of more or less verified updates originating from a range of official and unofficial sources. Citizens have long played a role in the construction of such event-driven news stories: as eyewitness informants reporting their observations orally to journalists at first, but increasingly also as sources of first-hand photo, audio, and video footage. Their role has gradually become more important with the growing availability of portable consumer devices that were able to capture such footage—at first in the form of amateur photo and film cameras (consider for instance the famous Zapruder film that captured the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963), and more recently with the availability of more and more powerful converged mobile digital devices that not only provide the functionality to capture eyewitness footage, but also to instantly post it to the Web (Vis *et al.* 2014: 385).

During the first wave of citizen media in the early 2000s, this convergence had not yet occurred fully; as a result, events such as the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States were at first still reported mostly by mainstream media cameras rather than through user-generated footage. By 2004, this had already begun to change, and tourist camera videos of the devastating impact of the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami circulated soon after the event. During the 7 July 2005 attacks in London, some victims and bystanders already shared their photos in the immediate aftermath, by using their early-generation smartphones to upload such content to photosharing site *Flickr* or to email them directly to family, friends, and the media. Yet the ability for such footage to reach a wider audience was still limited by the available infra-

structure: those who operated their own blogs or were members of photo- and videosharing sites such as *Flickr* and *YouTube* could post their content directly to the Web, but there was no guarantee that such material would then be discovered and utilised by mainstream or citizen media sites at the time; these sites largely facilitated only the publication of content, not its social discovery. Again, this shortcoming is specifically what an initiative like the BBC UGC Hub was set up to address: its "responsibility is to look for videos, images and first-hand accounts suitable for deepening the coverage of BBC Online, as well as to locate reliable sources that could also be used in various BBC radio and TV programs" (Bruno 2011: 30a).

The arrival of the current generation of popular social media sites—chiefly represented by *Facebook* and *Twitter*—has fundamentally changed this situation. In principle, of course, *all* media are social, in the sense that they facilitate communication between their authors and publishers and a more or less abstract, imagined audience consisting of other authors and publishers as well as readers, listeners, or viewers (Bruns 2015). Most publishing formats have remained largely one-directional, however: they include few opportunities for this audience to engage with and respond to authors and publishers directly. Even in the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave of citizen media, such engagement functions largely constituted an afterthought: bloggers engaged with other bloggers by linking to each other's sites, or to individual blog posts (and later blogging platforms made such inlinks more visible through so-called trackbacks or pingbacks), and blog readers responded to blog authors through the commentary functions attached to articles. But news bloggers and citizen journalists could choose the extent to which they provided and utilised such functions—as many mainstream media columnists-turned-bloggers demonstrated, it was possible to be a 'blogger' without ever linking to others or responding to commenters.

By contrast, what affords the current social media platforms their additional level of sociality, and means that they deserve to be set apart as explicitly *social* media, is that the interconnections and engagement between individual users are inherently built into these platforms. *Twitter* and *Facebook* are fundamentally constituted by the networks of followers or friends that have developed on these sites, just as much as they are constituted by the content that their users have posted and shared through them. It is a core practice here to connect with others—to 'follow' them on *Twitter*, or to create a reciprocal 'friendship' on *Facebook*—to the point that it is almost impossible, and certainly unusual, to use these platforms without connecting with other users

in this way. But to connect with another user is to subscribe to their feed of updates, and so these networks mean that whatever a given user posts on these sites is highly likely to reach at least a handful of others. Further, the functionality to share and comment on these posts is similarly built into the fundamental affordances of these sites, which makes it possible for information to be passed on across the network, at times widely and rapidly. Compared to older media, and even to the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave, this is "sociality of a different order of magnitude" (Bruns 2015: 2).

In the context of our present discussion, it is most important to note that such functionality has made it possible for the first-hand and eyewitness accounts of citizen reporters to 'go viral' to a much greater extent than had previously been possible—not only within these platforms themselves, but due to the interconnections between different media forms also across platforms and into the mainstream media. This is true almost equally for *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and a number of other social media platforms, but *Twitter* is nonetheless often singled out as the platform where such phenomena are most likely to occur, and occur rapidly—as Hermida notes,

> Twitter shares some similarities with other forms of communication. Like the telephone, it facilitates a real-time exchange of information. Like instant messaging, the information is sent in short bursts. But it extends the affordances of previous modes of communication by combining these features in both a one-to-many and many-to-many framework that is public, archived and searchable. Twitter allows a large number of users to communicate with each other simultaneously in real-time, based on an asymmetrical relationship between friends and followers. The messages form social streams of connected data that provide value both individually and in aggregate. (Hermida 2010a: n.p.)

Crucial to this are a number of features that are unique to or especially well developed on *Twitter*. First, although it does offer the opportunity to make accounts 'private' and visible only to approved followers, some 94% of all *Twitter* accounts are public, and can be followed by anyone; indeed, it is even possible to review the posts made by such public accounts simply by visiting the *Twitter* Website, without the need to create an account and log on to the site. Other platforms—such as *Facebook*—may also offer the opportunity to make accounts and their posts fully public, but the default here is usually to allow much more limited access to one's posts; in the context of acute news events, such limitations can serve to hinder the visibility and rapid dissemination of eyewitness reporting. Second, *Twitter* follower connections are non-reciprocal—except for 'private' accounts, it is possible in principle to

follow any other account on the platform without a need to be approved as a follower by the account's operator. This means that users caught up in major events and acting as citizen reporters can rapidly accumulate a large new following, further amplifying the reach of their updates. Third, and perhaps most importantly, *Twitter* users introduced the hashtag as a tool to mark their posts as relevant to a given topic (and Twitter, Inc. subsequently incorporated this functionality into the platform itself). Hashtags have made it possible to use the *Twitter* search function to quickly find all posts relating to a given event, issue, or topic, and indeed to continue to follow a live feed of new hashtagged posts as they come to hand. They are therefore inherently well suited to tracking the coverage of unfolding events—and it is no accident that hashtags first emerged on *Twitter* in the context of an acute event: the 2007 San Diego wildfires (Halavais 2014). In turn, finally, by tracking relevant hashtags users may also discover the accounts of key information sources on the hashtag event, whom they can then follow directly. More so than most other social media platforms, then, through this combination of features "Twitter provides a structure for [users] to act together as if in an organised way …. This provides a mechanism to aggregate, archive and analyse the individual tweets as a whole" (Hermida 2010a: n.p.).

On *Twitter* and elsewhere, this is not without its challenges, however—especially in the context of major breaking news events generating equal levels of information, misinformation, and even disinformation. As Yardi and boyd note for *Twitter*, for instance, "through hashtags and the public timeline, people can witness public conversations they otherwise might not and can participate in conversations they otherwise may not, but the environment's constraints limits their ability to do this well. This has implications for access to resources and diversity of information" (Yardi and boyd 2010: 317). Perhaps the key challenge in this context is the speed at which information about breaking news events becomes available through social media, and at which it scrolls past the user's window of attention. Due to its technical as well as user interface design *Twitter* is once again both the leading and the most problematic site in this context: "the code behind Twitter privileges social communication that is often event-based and event-driven, much like the content that traditionally makes the news. Twitter … actively encourages the here and now" (Hermida 2013: 298)—and it does so in a way that outpaces even the already accelerated rhythms of the electronic mainstream media's 24-hour news cycle, which still rely on access to reporters on the scene. Especially as acute events happen and breaking news

unfolds, a social media platform such as *Twitter* therefore "covers up for the weaknesses of the mainstream media through real time and seamless news updates" (anonymous journalist qtd. in Mare 2013: 91), but it also introduces new challenges of its own by providing a platform for the instant and unrestrained circulation of information and rumour about what is currently happening. This chapter explores how social media such as *Twitter* enter into the processes of breaking news coverage, therefore, and how their users contribute to, track, and make sense of the acute event feeds they observe in social media. We will see how these developments constitute the start of a *second* wave of citizen media that comes to have even more profound effects on journalism than the first.

News Breaks on *Twitter*

"Today … Twitter is an essential tool for breaking and researching stories. Frequently, a story will break on Twitter before appearing a few minutes later on the 'traditional' agency wires" (Eltringham 2010: n.p.). This is the view of Matthew Eltringham, editor of the BBC's College of Journalism Website, expressed as early as 2010. Although the singular focus on *Twitter* in this statement may underestimate the contributions made by other platforms—Dewan and Kumaraguru have found that "real world events appear fairly quickly on Facebook", too (2014: 2)—it nonetheless points to a very substantial and comparatively fast mindshift for a profession that, as we have seen in Chapter 2, has traditionally been very reluctant to embrace new media technologies. Key to this relatively rapid acceptance of social media in general, and *Twitter* in particular, as a tool of the trade for journalists (at least in the context of acute events) has been their demonstrable utility in breaking news events. Professionals in the industry have quickly realised that "social media use … allows journalists to gather first-hand material from the ground; this is especially advantageous if the journalist is physically remote from the scene. It can enhance the degree of authenticity, as it takes journalists closer to where the story is actually happening" (Gulyas 2013: 272).

A number of major events over the past 10 years have significantly contributed to this. While a number of more minor acute events following the San Diego wildfires contributed to the development and widespread acceptance of hashtags as means of bringing together users around a shared topic of interest

in an *ad hoc* fashion, many commentators point to the Mumbai terrorist attack on 26 November 2008 as the first major event during which *Twitter* played an important role in the sourcing and dissemination of eyewitness accounts even while the attack itself still unfolded. As Allan reports,

> during the crisis, the highly sensationalized forms of news coverage provided by the Indian news media—what critics called the "TV terror" of the 24-hour news channels—were widely condemned for reporting "exclusives," which more often than not proved to be wildly inaccurate rumors. Attracting much more positive attention, however, was the surprising role played by ordinary citizens in gathering information, with the micro-blogging service Twitter regularly singled out for praise as a vital source for real-time citizen news. (Allan 2013: 169–70)

Mainstream news outlets themselves soon tapped into this new resource, reporting on how the attack was covered by eyewitnesses and other bystanders on *Twitter* and sourcing their information directly from the platform. In the end, "The Guardian, CNN, and other news sites instead curated what was popping up on Twitter, Flickr and elsewhere", but not all news organisations were prepared to change their approach so quickly, so soon: for instance, "NYTimes.com posted a front-page notice asking witnesses in Mumbai to send reports" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.) using non-public channels such as email.

Especially notable during this incident was the apparent use of social media by eyewitnesses caught up in the attacks even as they were still holed up in the danger zone—a practice that may well have placed such witnesses in additional danger if the attackers had had access to social media themselves. Echoing the Palestinian terror attack on the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, during which the attackers were informed about police plans and movements by watching the live broadcast TV coverage from outside the Olympic village where they had taken hostages, in Mumbai too the terrorists could have followed *Twitter* and other social media to gain a detailed picture of counter-terror units' movements outside the hotel they had attacked. Although it remains unclear whether the Mumbai attackers did use such information, concerns about this possibility certainly circulated at the time:

> one instance of false reporting, repeatedly circulated on Twitter, claimed that the Indian government was alarmed by what was happening on the social network. Fearful that the information being shared by eyewitnesses on the scene was proving to be useful to the attackers, government officials, it was alleged, were urging Twitter users to cease their efforts, while also attempting to block Twitter's access to the country itself. (Allan 2013: 170)

Such blocking might well have done more harm than good, however, as it would also have prevented ordinary bystanders from receiving the information required to keep themselves out of danger.

A number of other acute events followed the Mumbai attacks in subsequent years, and contributed to the growing recognition of *Twitter* itself, and of social media more generally, as important tools for reporting and sourcing information during such incidents. They include the water landing of a commercial passenger plane on the Hudson River in New York City in 2010—when, as O'Connor reports,

> despite the fact that the headquarters of international wire services, major metropolitan newspapers, and big-time television networks are *literally opposite* the crash site, Twitter user Janis Krums scooped them all when he "tweeted" his report of "a plane in the Hudson" and posted an iPhone photo on TwitPic (O'Connor 2009: n.p.)

—as well as the 2009 Iranian election and its aftermath, during which the U.S. State Department asked *Twitter* to delay scheduled server maintenance in order not to disrupt the use of the platform as a way for opposition activists to share information about protests against vote rigging (Braun and Gillespie 2011: 390). They also include major natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the series of earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand, during 2010 and 2011, or the earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear meltdown in the Sendai region of Japan in 2011—after each of which the first major news alerts by eyewitnesses and news organisations, as well as reports, photos, and videos, were disseminated using social media.

Such breaking news events even include, somewhat more inadvertently, the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Not only did rumours of this U.S. military operation first circulate on *Twitter*, ahead of a press conference by President Barack Obama, when "a tweet by Keith Urbahn, a staff member of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld", revealed the news (Moon and Hadley 2014: 289; also see Newman 2011: 30–34)—in retrospect it also emerged that the military incursion itself had unknowingly been live-tweeted by an Abbottabad resident wondering about the unusual level of military activity. As Newman reports,

> the following morning he tweeted:
> Uh oh, now I'm the guy who liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it. (Newman 2011: 30)

The role of social media in the coverage of such events not only led mainstream media to take a growing interest in the way that social media content might be able to be used to supplement conventional reporting, especially in the context of breaking news when credible information from the scene of the incident is scarce. In addition, ordinary social media users also increasingly turned to social media as a primary source of information about these events, alongside or even as a replacement for more conventional media channels. In Haiti, for instance, "not only news organizations, but also users around the world started to use social media websites to get up-to-date information on the earthquake and to support the local population" (Bruno 2011: 7). This is unsurprising at a time when—because there are no professional journalists on the ground yet—even mainstream media are reduced to reporting on the rumours they can glean from *Twitter* and similar platforms, but the more familiar and comfortable users become with this approach to sourcing their information, the harder it also becomes for mainstream media to win them back again during the later stages of an incident.

Bruno therefore proposes that, "if we allow ourselves to paraphrase the *CNN effect* of the 1990s, this changeover in the media landscape could be called the *Twitter effect*" (Bruno 2011: 8): news breaks on *Twitter*, and the mainstream media are forced to play catch-up. As a result, Jarvis suggests, "the witnesses are taking over the news. That will fundamentally change our experience of news, the role of witnesses and participants, the role of journalists and news organisations, and the impact reporting has on events" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.). Indeed, the observation of such processes in other events also creates "a learning effect" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1397), making it increasingly likely that social media users will be similarly prepared to act as eyewitnesses if ever they are caught up in breaking news events themselves. Building on Singer's concept of normalisation as we have encountered it in the previous chapter (Singer 2005), we could therefore suggest that what can be observed over the course of a number of successive acute events during the second half of the 2000s is the normalisation of the use of *Twitter* and other social media platforms for eyewitness reporting by citizen reporters.

Unsurprisingly, social media have turned out to be an especially important reporting tool at times when other media channels are unavailable due to outages or interference. Participants here may include not only those citizens directly caught up immediately in the event, but also others located further afield. In addition to the noted role played by social media in protests after the 2009 Iranian elections, Mare reports that when autocratic regimes in Malawi

and Mozambique imposed media censorship, "citizen journalists outside the two countries took it upon themselves to maintain the momentum, using social media and mobile phones to bridge geographical barriers and maintain the coverage of events in the virtual sphere" (Mare 2013: 89). Even better known, and by now almost assuming mythological status as a break-through moment for both *Facebook* and *Twitter* as tools for the dissemination of breaking news, is the role that these platforms played in covering—and helping to organise—the protests collectively known as the Arab Spring in countries across Northern Africa and the Middle East. Here again, the mainstream media turned "to Twitter, both to learn from on-the-ground sources, and to rapidly distribute updates" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1376)—but so did the people of these countries themselves, and their supporters and sympathisers elsewhere in the world, especially in the absence of other reliable media sources:

> the Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak were organized through a complex network that combined heavy Twitter and Facebook use with other forms of interpersonal communication. During this period, access to mainstream media was [variously] blocked, foreign and native journalists were intimidated, and access to the Internet was controlled and eventually shut down. Twitter, however, provided a continuous stream of events in real time throughout the crisis. (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 266)

Such uses fundamentally challenge the control over the flows of information that had previously been exercised by autocratic, undemocratic regimes from Tunisia to Egypt, from Russia to Turkey. But in a similar way they also once again challenge the regimes of gatekeeping still employed by the mainstream media, as source information and eyewitness accounts during acute events now readily circulate on social media well before, and independently of, the news judgments applied by journalists and editors. This is beneficial—"social media demonstrate an unprecedented ability for the politically engaged to both bypass and influence traditional information flows" (Paterson 2013: 2)—as well as problematic—social media also facilitate the circulation of unverified and potentially fundamentally wrong information about the events they cover—, but most immediately it poses a fundamentally challenge to journalists to adjust their working practices to this new media environment. As one of the journalists interviewed by Verweij and van Noort put it, "if you as a journalist don't use it, you do yourself a disservice as news breaks on Twitter, radio, television, newspaper—in that order" (qtd. in Verweij and van Noort 2014: 111).

The Dynamics of Breaking News on Social Media

"There is journalism before Twitter and journalism after Twitter. No single company has ever had the power to report and disseminate events with the speed and geographic reach of the network" (Bell 2015: n.p.). This is even in spite of the fact that *Twitter*'s developers themselves were largely unaware of its potential as a news network. As the platform's co-founder Biz Stone pointed out in a 2009 interview,

> the news applications surprised us …. We noticed in prototypes early on … that things like earthquakes led to Twitter updates. The first Twitter report of the ground shaking during recent tremors in California, for example, came nine minutes before the first Associated Press alert. So we knew early on that a shared event such as an earthquake would lead people to look at Twitter for news almost without thinking. (Biz Stone in O'Connor 2009: n.p.)

The simple, even simplistic, *Twitter* user interface with its 140-character updates may contribute in important ways to such uses: compared even to *Facebook*, and certainly to older online publishing platforms such as blogs, it makes it a great deal easier to post a quick update from on the ground even while still in the danger area; *Twitter* cleverly tapped into the now widespread uptake of SMS texting via mobile devices, and translated such practices to a Web-based social media and social networking environment. Although at times inadvisable, it is therefore common to see updates from users caught up in breaking news events well before they have reached safety.

This "can also benefit journalism, which thereby gains a new seismograph for current and surprising events" (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 9; my translation)—and indeed the seismological metaphor is especially apt, as studies in Japan have shown that spikes in *Twitter* activity can be used to detect new earthquakes well before official agencies have assessed their magnitude and location (Sakaki *et al.* 2010). In the process, the *Twitter* response to acute events—whether natural disasters or anthropogenic crises—undergoes a number of stages, which are worth exploring in greater detail in the following discussion. It should again be noted that for the most part, these also apply to other social media platforms, but that the specific configuration of platform affordances provided by *Twitter* means that "it consistently carries news before either Facebook or Google Plus" (Osborne and Dredze 2014: 613).

Ad Hoc Emergence

With almost any breaking news event that occurs in a populated environment, there is by now a very good chance that one of the bystanders caught up in the event will not only have a social media account, but will also have access to a mobile device connected to the Internet, enabling them to post a first report from the scene almost immediately. Unless they are themselves—by sheer coincidence—present on the scene, this necessarily outpaces and out-scoops any professional journalists; indeed, it is notable that the professional journalists who are sometimes the first voices to be featured in the mainstream media as natural disasters or human-made events occur are often drawn into the coverage not by virtue of their professional standing, but because they happened to be holidaying at the scene of a natural disaster or live in the suburb affected by a terror attack. Even these professional journalists, in other words, participate at that moment in the role of eyewitnesses and citizen journalists.

In this earliest, emergent state of a breaking news story, then, "posts from citizen journalists and eyewitnesses can help fill the 'news vacuum' that immediately follows an event, when media organisations do not have a reporter in the field" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1195). The social media users who contribute to the coverage of the event at this point do so not out of a profound desire to 'become the media', as the very deliberate, self-selecting citizen journalists and news bloggers of the first wave of citizen media did, but simply because they are thrust by circumstances into the centre of developments—they are, in the truest sense of the term, performing random acts of journalism. But, suddenly "recast as journalists" by accident in this way, "they function based on what they have been socialized to recognize as accepted news values, [and] adapt them to the context … and their own perspective" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). Their immediate coverage typically includes text-based updates posted via *Twitter* and *Facebook*, but increasingly also involves audio and video materials; "large amounts of user-generated imagery [are] typically produced in response to crisis events and circulated within wider media ecologies" (Vis *et al.* 2014: 385), and often attempt to mirror the professional styles of disaster coverage that such citizen reporters are familiar with from the nightly news.

Such reports are visible in the first place only to other users who already follow these inadvertent eyewitnesses, and who may in turn redistribute these updates by retweeting them on *Twitter* or on-sharing them on *Facebook*; gradually, this enables the reports to reach a larger audience and may also result

in multiple such updates from different eyewitnesses appearing alongside each other in social media users' newsfeeds. Original posters or subsequent redistributors may also already have begun to introduce what appear to be sensible hashtags that describe the event; although individual and idiosyncratic at first, through repetition and imitation these will often quickly converge into one or a handful of widely used hashtags that increasingly enable interested social media users to track the event as it unfolds. In this way, social media such as Twitter "serve as a convening site wherein people without previously shared interests or existing relationships gather around a particular topic" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1397).

Notably, as they arise such hashtags may also be "understood as frames for naming … events" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 278), and thus exercise a certain interpretive power over what is unfolding; this power is especially pronounced given that the emergent hashtag may indeed be the first time that a breaking news event is given a distinctive descriptive marker. Borrowing an example from Don DeLillo's famous novel *White Noise* (1985), a hashtag such as #toxicevent would contribute to a very different framing from #trainaccident or #chemicalspill, for instance. The appropriate hashtags for specific events are therefore sometimes hotly disputed even while the event still unfolds: this occurs both for simply practical reasons, as in the case of the 2010/2011 Christchurch earthquakes, when the concurrent use of #eqnz and #nzeq (both standing for "New Zealand earthquake", but in different order) threatened to bifurcate the *Twitter* community and to undermine efficient information dissemination (Bruns and Burgess 2015); and at times when the interpretation implied by a chosen hashtag (e.g. #accident vs. #attack) might result in very different responses from participating users.

In earlier events, such hashtags emerged largely from the general *Twitter* user community engaging with an acute event; more recently, however, news organisations and other relevant authorities have become more active in proposing their own hashtag choices (not least also to reassert their news framing power, perhaps), with varying degrees of success. During the 2010/11 Christchurch earthquakes, *Twitter* users actively requested that the official New Zealand Civil Defence account use the #eqnz hashtag in order to make its updates more widely visible; in essence, the social media community provided some *ad hoc* training to the operators of the account in this instance (Bruns and Burgess 2015). Today, hashtags usually emerge from the interplay between communities and authorities—sometimes controversially so, when the hashtag chosen by a news organisation appears unacceptable to large

numbers of social media users because it implies a framing that is not yet borne out by the available information about the event. In such cases, users may choose to persist in using their own hashtags, offering a different framing.

As hashtags are established and the accessibility and circulation of relevant information about an acute event is thus enhanced, this also enables the greater participation of more remote social media users: while they may not have any first-hand information to contribute, they can source additional material from the social media platform or from elsewhere on the Web, and introduce it to the hashtag feed by (re)posting it with the event hashtag attached. This largely also bypasses the bottlenecks to information dissemination imposed by infrastructure breakdowns or state censorship: as Meraz and Papacharissi describe it in the context of the Iranian post-election protests in 2009, social media "enabled a global audience to remotely listen in on the Iranian conflict when access to other media was blocked" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 141), as well as to support the struggle by assisting in the dissemination of crucial information.

But due to the nature of *Twitter* and similar platforms as fundamentally social media, what is being shared here does not solely consist of conventional news reports. "Hashtag feeds deviate from the organizational logic of prominent news values to provide coherence by blending fact with opinion, and objectivity with subjectivity": they include "both news and conversations about the news" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 267). In this they therefore resemble the spaces of citizen journalism and news blogging in their second-tier roles, as we have encountered them during the first wave of citizen media, more than the products of conventional journalism—even though, as we have noted in Chapter 2, in the wake of citizen media there has also been a considerable shift towards the greater inclusion of opinion and commentary and away from the ideal of pure objectivity in the mainstream journalism industry.

Selective Repetition through Gatewatching

What unfolds in social media environments, once the initial breaking news event hashtag has been established and an *ad hoc* public (Bruns and Burgess 2015) of participants has gathered around it, thus represents a hybrid form of news coverage: social media serve "as a common medium for professional journalism and citizen journalism, and as a site of global information flow" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1377). The content that begins to circulate here combines

a range of materials: it includes first-hand eyewitness reports and footage from citizen reporters on the ground; breaking news updates posted by the accounts of journalists and news organisations, at first in plain text but gradually also including snippets of mainstream news footage and/or links to articles on their Websites; information from official sources such as government authorities, police and other emergency services, politicians, or commercial services including public transport, communication, or health services providers; as well as opinion, commentary, analysis, and reaction from a broad range of more or less informed and knowledgeable professional and amateur participants. The volume of such information ebbs and flows with the dynamics of the event itself, from "the torrent of conjecture ahead of President Obama's announcement of the death of Bin Laden" (Hermida 2014: 360) to the flurry of re-sharing key official statements as they are finally published.

The products of conventional, professional journalism represent only one component of the information that circulates across social media platforms in the immediate aftermath of acute events, therefore, and arguably constitute not even the largest part. Instead, in concert with other platforms,

> Twitter facilitates the instant, online dissemination and reception of short fragments of information from sources outside the formal structures of journalism, creating social awareness streams that provide a constantly updated, live representation of the experiences, interests, and opinions of users. (Hermida 2014: 360)

Such streams are fundamentally unfiltered, and co-created by many hundreds or thousands of participants, all re-sharing existing information and posting original material in an at best loosely coordinated fashion. This is facilitated by the extremely low barriers to participation in such social media spaces, where the first step from information recipient to information disseminator is made by a click or the 'retweet' or 'share' button; in this sense, these participants all act as produsers of the communal information stream.

In their raw form, such streams may be overwhelming for users, and can be difficult to parse. Notably, in these streams "new pieces of information are released piecemeal, often starting off as unverified information in the form of a rumour" that can "spread to large numbers of users" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 2), and an important challenge for users is therefore to distinguish rumour from fact. This is a collective task addressed by the active participants in acute events streams—it does not always succeed, but a recent study on a number of acute events suggests that there are some notable differences in how social media users engage with true and false information: "while the median

true rumour is resolved in about 2 hours, the median false rumour takes over 14 hours to be resolved" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 14).

The barriers to participating in the social media coverage of breaking news events are thus as low as re-posting an existing message, or tweeting a new post using a prominent event hashtag. There are no effective mechanisms in place to bar users from contributing in this way or to remove their posts from the stream, even if they have turned out to contain untruths. The streams relating to acute, breaking news events are therefore often voluminous and fast-paced. These three factors combine to position the further re-posting of existing social media posts as the major mechanism for the collective management of acute events streams by the community of users participating in them. This may appear paradoxical at first, as it further increases the volume of information in the stream; however, through the selective reposting of especially valuable and insightful information social media users are able to lend such posts (and the users who posted them) a comparatively greater visibility than is available for posts that appear only once, without further re-posting. These collectively amplified posts therefore gain a much greater chance of being widely disseminated and read.

Describing this process for the case of the #egypt stream covering the Arab Spring protests, Meraz and Papacharissi note that this "the repetitive pace of activity, attained through retweeting, provided a refrain-like rhythm to the stream, supported through a chorus of users who collectively crowdsourced prevalent actors and their tweets to prominence" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). The central mechanism in such crowdsourcing processes is the practice of gatewatching that we have already encountered as a foundational element for the first wave of citizen journalism in Chapter 2, translated here to the environments of contemporary social media. Such gatewatching is now all the more crucial as there is now no opportunity at all any more to keep the gates of other participants' social media accounts and control what information passes through them; any user can contribute to any event stream, regardless of their ability to make a meaningful contribution. In this situation, gatewatching—the observation of the output gates of other social media participants, and the selective re-sharing of information that appears most important, relevant, and meaningful—is operationalised as the key mechanism for collectively highlighting and amplifying those posts that deserve greater attention and reach.

Such collective gatewatching processes make a number of contributions. First, as Hermida notes, they determine to some extent "who makes the news"

and "what becomes newsworthy", at least within the social media stream itself (Hermida 2013: 305). The selection criteria utilised here may well deviate from those common in the mainstream media, however: as we have already seen, social media streams tend to combine a broader range of news, opinion, analysis, and reaction than is commonly found in conventional news channels. As a result, the range of content selected, and the range of sources that such content originates from, may well be broader and more diverse.

At the same time, the long-term socialisation of *Twitter* and *Facebook* users to conventional news formats does also mean that such formats do tend to be prominent here. In the case of #egypt, for instance,

> the stream gravitated toward news and opinions relevant to the uprisings, even though the architecture of the platform permitted deviation from the dominant focus. Comments that were irrelevant or unrelated were simply not retweeted or were ignored and thus were organically eliminated from the process of forming the dominant news frame or story. (Papacharissi 2014: 43)

This, then, is a second major contribution made by collective gatewatching: not only does it help to surface some of the most salient content available in the stream by selectively re-posting and thus amplifying it, but in the process it also selects and supports specific news frames applied to the event. We have seen this already with the emergence of hashtags themselves, which often imply a certain framing (at least when they are not entirely descriptive, as in the case of #egypt—but even here the greater overall attention paid to #egypt rather than #libya or #tunisia could be seen as a form of framing); the further framing work performed by the gatewatching processes *within* a given hashtag therefore represents a secondary, more detailed and specific form of news framing, or indeed frame amplification (Sivek 2014: 601).

In performing these functions, then, the collective gatewatching of unfolding events through social media also lends these events a greater consistency and coherence. The emergence of key news stories and news frames that such gatewatching enables results "in the collaborative construction of events out of atomized stories and stories out of subjectively experienced events" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 267). By virtue of its selective, continuous repetition of key content, gatewatching creates information redundancy—but in the "always-on, ambient environment" (Hermida 2013: 305) of high-volume, real-time social media streams such redundancy is positive and beneficial rather than problematic. In particular, redundancy and repetition make it possible even for more casual followers to use social media to stay

informed about a breaking news event: they do not need to remain constantly attentive to the event stream, but can dip in and out without fearing that they might miss the crucial new information contained in a message that appears only once. Indeed, at least in major breaking news events that attract a large number of users participating as gatewatchers in this way, they may not even need to follow the event stream itself, but are likely to see enough re-posted information in the personal feeds of their friends and connections to be able to form at least a first impression of what is happening.

The news choices made by social media users acting as gatewatchers during breaking news events are often also affective in nature, at least to a point: in #egypt, for instance, "most tweets were not just news or just opinion, but typically a blend of emotionally charged opinions on news or news updates to the point where it was difficult to distinguish news from opinion and from emotion, and doing so missed the point" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). Arguably, in fact—and mirroring the motivations of many of the citizen journalists and news bloggers of the first wave of citizen media—it is precisely this perceived affective connection to the news event that motivates social media users to become active as gatewatchers in the first place. Indeed, Papacharissi suggests that this is a fundamental, distinctive feature of social media platforms themselves: "the storytelling infrastructure of platforms like Facebook or Twitter invites observers to tune into events they are physically removed from by imagining what these might feel like for people directly experiencing them", thereby contributing to "civic mobilization" around such events (Papacharissi 2014: 4).

But this observation should not be misunderstood as a sign that social media feeds relating to breaking news events are overwhelmed by emotive statements to the detriment of the circulation of meaningful information. Rather, precisely because they do care deeply about the acute events they are observing from a distance, social media users invest their time in the selective gatewatching of information that makes a relevant and meaningful contribution to understanding the event. This selection process has been documented in a number of studies: Chew and Eysenbach, for instance, found that merely personal reactions to acute events were rarely retweeted; "there is … little interest or perceived benefit in reposting second-hand personal information" (Chew and Eysenbach 2010: 10; cf. Bruns *et al.* 2012) when more valuable news and analysis could be retweeted instead. During the Egyptian uprising, too, "comments that were irrelevant or unrelated were simply not retweeted or ignored, and thus organically eliminated from the process of forming the

dominant news story" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). And the Pew Research Center reports that even in the highly emotively charged atmosphere following the killing of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin, "after the July 13, 2013, acquittal of [shooter] George Zimmerman … the largest component of the Twitter conversation (39% of all expressed sentiments in tweets about the event) shared news of that verdict without offering an opinion" (Pew Research Center, 2013: 3).

Gatewatching as a Collective and Collaborative Practice

In other words, "tuning in affectively does not mean that reactions are strictly emotional; they may also be rational" (Papacharissi 2014: 4)—*because* a story feels important to them, social media gatewatchers may invest especially much time and effort in getting the information right and avoiding the spread of misinformation. Although the kind of gatewatching we can observe here is at first an individual, uncoordinated activity, the level of interest and engagement that results from such affective connection to an acute event can therefore also lead to more collective and collaborative practices: gatewatchers begin to observe each other's selection choices, and may adopt or critique them. From this perspective, "social networks can be regarded as huge pools of 'collective intelligence'" (Broersma and Graham 2012: 404; also cf. Hermida 2010b: 298; 2012: 662).

It is therefore possible to see hashtags as "a user-generated collaborative argument on what is news" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 268): participating users support the collective highlighting of key information, and thereby the framing of an event, but by choosing diverse aspects of the developments that they feel are worth highlighting also introduce different angles on the same story that other users, in turn, may endorse or dismiss in their own gatewatching and reposting activities. In addition, of course, users do not only work with the material already circulating within the established social media stream, but also continuously introduce new information found elsewhere: outside of the main hashtag relating to the event, and reposted with the hashtag attached; on mainstream and alternative news sites, and introduced into the hashtag discussion through new posts; on the sites of relevant organisations providing additional source materials, and brought to the attention of hashtag followers by posting links; or even from non-Internet media including radio and television, and shared through summaries or screenshots. This results in several overlapping layers of gatewatching practices, therefore,

drawing on material both internal and external to social media and publicising its existence by sharing it on social media.

As the social media stream related to an acute event thus becomes the collation point for information gleaned from a wide range of online and offline media, of official and unofficial sources, and of journalistic, para-journalistic, and non-journalistic contributors, the processes by which such materials are gathered and evaluated by the participating community of social media users can be described as a form of "social media curation" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 4). Heinderyckx suggests that such curation constitutes a kind of "second-order gatekeeping" (2015: 262), but to describe the process in this way substantially overstates the ability of social media users to keep the gates through which information flows: because of the collective and eventually perhaps also collaborative nature of social media curation, in which no one user has the power to restrict information from circulation and in which the visibility of any piece of information is determined only by the aggregate choices of re-sharing made by a multitude of participants, what happens here is at best a process of collective, selective amplification. All of the information shared and evaluated through social media curation has already passed through the gates of publication; it cannot be withdrawn from circulation, but only made more or less visible through the concerted efforts of social media users.

In spite of the widespread use of 'curation' as a term to describe these processes, this *social* and *real-time* curation therefore diverges crucially from the individual, retrospective curation performed by conventional curators:

> the traditional notion of a curator is a trained expert who selects the finest objects and arranges them in a careful and meaningful way. This is curation in a world of scarce and precious objects. By contrast, social media is not a world of precious scarcity but of data abundance. Digital media can be copied, transferred, filtered, remixed, and sorted on the fly. (Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010: 312)

The processes observed here once again point to Shirky's observation that such online media reorder the publishing process from 'filter, then publish' to 'publish, then filter', therefore (Shirky 2002: n.p.). The approach on *Twitter* is often one of 'tweet first, verify later', and this has been criticised—especially by professional journalists—as enabling the circulation of rumours and misinformation; however, at the same time this approach also suits the almost irresistible drive towards an instantaneity of coverage that is a fundamental feature of a real-time medium such as *Twitter* (as well as, to a perhaps less pro-

nounced extent, of other social media platforms). "The ability to live-tweet events as they happen presents the primary appeal of Twitter. At times when mainstream media are restricted in their ability to report, or disseminate information, it is because of this ability that platforms like Twitter rise to prominence" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). Here we see another reason for the especially strong uptake of *Twitter* and similar platforms during breaking news events, then: while mainstream journalists are still evaluating what information they feel comfortable releasing to their audiences, social media enable the emergence of "a parallel market of information" that keeps "the information flows going—even if it means as a mix of truths, half truths, and untruths" (Moyo 2009: 563).

Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira have suggested that this points to a fundamental "temporal incompatibility of Twitter with our conventional definitions of what is news, what separates fact from opinion, and subjectivity from objectivity" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 274): they suggest that the platform "affords journalists neither the time to process information, nor the privilege of being the first to report it" (279). Although this may be true, it is also evident that an increasing number of journalists are themselves beginning to make effective use of social media during acute events, both in sharing their own reports (and those of their colleagues), and in sourcing first-hand information and analysis from the wider social media community (Heinrich 2012a: 772); we will explore such professional uses further in Chapters 5 and 6. Further, while the logics and dynamics of social media such as *Twitter* may be incompatible with the most conventional forms of news reporting, they are not entirely different from the similarly fast-paced rhythms of 24-hour broadcast news channels—both are forced to make rapid, *ad hoc* news judgments.

Indeed, Hermida suggests that rather than undermining journalistic processes and practices social media are extending them to participation by a much broader range of actors, including both professional journalists and other interested social media users. "A networked, distributed architecture of communication does not require an abandonment of the discipline of verification" that is fundamental to journalistic work, for instance: instead, the literacies required for verification are "informed by the standards of routines, rituals, and practices set by print journalism" and are now "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content" (Hermida 2012: 662). The social media users who collectively and even collaboratively verify the information that already circulates through

their networks, by selectively re-posting the material they deem to be trust-worthy, are therefore exercising a very well-established type of news judg-ment, even if they do so in unconventional contexts and by non-traditional means.

Such verification processes clearly are not always successful; for in-stance, "following the Boston Marathon bombings [in 2013], social media tried to crowdsource the identifying of the perpetrators with unsatisfactory results" (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 408), leading to the dissemination of infor-mation and photos of innocent bystanders wrongly thought to have been involved in the attack. This is deeply concerning and can have profoundly negative repercussions for the individuals concerned; however, similar such mistakes have also been made at times by mainstream media outlets, and such cases cannot therefore be used to fundamentally dismiss social verifi-cation processes as ineffective. Mistakes have been and will continue to be made; the more important question—and one which still requires further study—is whether such mistakes occur significantly more often on social media than they do in conventional mainstream news media. A recent study by Zubiaga *et al.* remains somewhat inconclusive on this point: they report that "whilst one can readily see users denying rumours once they have been debunked, users appear to be less capable of distinguishing true from false rumours when their veracity remains in question" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 1).

In applying their news judgment both on what stories are likely to be true or false, and on what information is relevant and deserves further am-plification, social media users are drawing on a set of unspoken news values that are largely likely to be derived from a life-long socialisation by expo-sure to the mainstream news. As a greater number of users are relying on social media as an important or even as their primary news source, however (Newman *et al.* 2016: 9), there is also the possibility for new news values to arise endogenously, reflecting less the long-established understandings of conventional journalism and more a collective sense of what social media users themselves believe to be important. This could prove to be a subtle but an important shift:

> differences lie not in the news values that are prevalent, but in who makes the de-cisions based on the same news values. So, whereas in a traditional news room, it is the professional hierarchy and ethos that drives how these news values are applied to judge and cover events, in the case of Twitter, these judgments were made collective-ly and organically. (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 272)

The Structuration of Social News Curation Communities

It is important not to overstate the extent to which such activities proceed through conscious collaboration—for the most part, they are likely to be aggregate and collective rather than explicitly interactive and coordinated. But it is precisely these differences between merely casual, *ad hoc* contribution (by re-sharing an occasional social media post) and more committed, considered, and collaborative curation that lead to a gradual structuration amongst the crowds of social media users participating in the tracking of acute events, and that can lead to the formation of genuine communities of leading contributors at their core. Such community formation does not always take place to the fullest extent—sometimes simply because the event is not of sufficient significance or duration to allow such structuration processes to run their course—but for major, longer-term acute events such as the Arab Spring protests or the Sendai earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown they can lead to the emergence of a number of clearly recognised leading voices. This emergence resembles the formation of heterarchical leadership groups in produsage projects (Bruns 2008), and is a sign of a similar recognition of important contributors to the collective effort by virtue of their continued constructive engagement.

Especially because, in the context of acute news events, the merit of individual participants is based on their ability to evaluate and frame information as part of an unfolding news story, such processes can constitute a competitive struggle between different contributors over the most plausible interpretation of the available information; they can therefore also enable "users who possess nonelite status offline to gain influential status" in the emerging social media curation community (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 142). Journalists and other traditional elites are not necessarily in a position of greater interpretive power in such contexts, and in this sense social media can carry over into this new environment some of the alternative, activist ethos of the first wave of citizen media that responded directly to the perceived shortcomings and lack of multiperspectival diversity in the established mainstream media. This is not to claim that elite actors' contributions are inherently dismissed as biased and untrustworthy, of course—but they, like other participants, must prove to be insightful and reasonable contributors to the collective task of making sense of the acute news event.

In this context, important distinctions between those users engaging primarily as information sources and those who act predominantly as social media curators also emerge. As Papacharissi reports it for the case of #egypt, "while

media elites frequently dominated blocks of the feed through constant tagged updates, they were only awarded leader status through retweets or mentions. Even though prominent, these actors occupied a peripheral position in the stream" (Papacharissi 2014: 46). By contrast, other participants from outside of the mainstream media engaged more directly in the discussion and evaluation of events as they unfolded: "a second, parallel and more vocal stream of opinion leaders emerged, consisting of bloggers, activists, and intellectuals with some prior involvement with online activism that was associated with the uprisings" (46).

This does not mean that journalists and other media professionals are inherently shut out from contributing as social media curators, and are relegated *a priori* to a role as mere news sources for the social media stream. Across several major breaking news events, professional journalists have risen to prominence not (or not primarily) for their first-hand reporting, but because they positioned themselves as curators of incoming information from a variety of conventional and unconventional sources on *Twitter* and other social media platforms. During several political leadership changes in Australia, for instance, journalists Latika Bourke and Annabel Crabb helped facilitate the *Twitter*-based evaluation of developments (Posetti 2010; Bruns and Burgess 2011); after the arrest of Paralympic sprinter Oscar Pistorius for the killing of Reeva Steenkamp in 2013, South African journalist Barry Bateman became a crucial conduit for information as it came to hand (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 110); "journalists Paul Lewis and Ravi Somaiya made extensive use of Twitter" during the London and U.K. riots in 2011 (Vis 2013: 43); and perhaps most famously of all, Andy Carvin—a social media strategist for National Public Radio in the United States—became one of the leading news curators during the protests of the Arab Spring: "Carvin engaged in gatewatching by pointing his followers to source material provided by a diverse set of actors online, contributing to a 'real-time verification system'" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494).

As a result of these breakthrough events, but also of a series of less groundbreaking incremental developments in how professional journalists and ordinary citizens engage on social media platforms during breaking news stories, "the word 'curation' has become a buzzword among many bloggers and social technologists as one of the next big technology trends" (Liu 2010: 19–20). How this idea of the social curation of emerging news stories on social media platforms is defined continues to vary across different studies of the phenomenon, however. Perhaps most usefully, Thorson and Wells state that "cu-

rators are active selectors and shapers of content working under conditions of content abundance. Curators do not only receive messages or filter them out. They may search out content and engage in reframing and remixing" (2015: 31). This is also in line with Hermida's point that "the curator is distilling an abundance of data on the fly" (Hermida 2012: 665), and reflects the underlying observation that the social news curator role responds to a fundamental challenge arising from the informational environment of social media and the wider Web, in which gatekeeping is no longer effective and information flows are unruly and unpredictable. As a result,

> eyewitness journalism in social media often lacks a clear storyline which calls for …
> someone to make sense out of the flow of information, to find the best content and to
> give credit to the right sources and at the same time to preserve unique information
> provided through social media. (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 12)

The curators who emerge to prominence in major breaking news events are no longer necessarily prominent journalists, experts, activists, or others with a pre-existing and recognised track record in reporting on the issue or topic at hand, however. They instead also include "organically emerging leaders" (Papacharissi 2014: 47) whose contributions are largely judged on their own merits, as demonstrated in the current context, rather than on the basis of past track records or institutional imprints. Indeed, this leads Lotan *et al.* to suggest that journalists operating their individual social media accounts may be in a better position to establish themselves as recognised social curators than would be possible for impersonal, institutional news accounts: "it may be more effective to let journalists control their individual Twitter accounts and build audiences through them, than to disseminate information through official accounts with organizational identities" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1400). The case of NPR's Andy Carvin, whose curational activities arguably outperformed those of major, much better-resourced news organisations, certainly lends support to this view, and we will explore these questions further when we examine professional journalists' adoption of social media in Chapter 5.

In fact, it is even possible for new social media accounts, created on the fly to address a current acute event, to play a substantial role in news discussion and curation, in spite of the complete lack of a track record for such an account. This was the case for instance in the U.K. riots of 2011, when "'riots accounts' … were specifically set up to tweet the riots, provide information or, in the case of 'riotcleanup', encourage cleaning activities in the aftermath of the riots." Vis reports that in her study "the @riotcleanup account is the most

mentioned account … and had a significant reach as well as high newsworthiness during a short period of time" (Vis 2013: 35). Individual journalists as well as news organisations, both of whom have a long-term interest in building an audience for their social media accounts, are not especially likely to set up such event-specific accounts, however—by contrast, ordinary social media users with sufficient motivation to become citizen curators for the duration of an event will be significantly more likely to do so.

The role played by Andy Carvin as a social media-based curator of news during the Arab Spring protests indicates that under the right circumstances media professionals can rise to substantial prominence, however. "Carvin … emerged as a key broker of information on Twitter during the Arab Spring": as events in Egypt and elsewhere unfolded, he "would often link to images from demonstrators, curate a range of discussion and opinion about events, and frequently ask his followers (then about 50,000 strong) to help him make sense of the bits of information he encountered" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 479). Indeed, Carvin appears to have made a deliberate choice to draw on a diverse range of sources, perhaps in reaction to the uncertain and fast-moving nature of the events he was tracking:

> while Carvin was in contact with a considerable number of journalists, our analysis indicated that he favored nonelite sources, particularly in Egypt. Tweets by nonelite sources accounted for just under 50% of all the messages in our sample, meaning that alternative voices had a greater influence over the content flowing through Carvin's Twitter stream than journalists or other elite sources. (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 492)

This breaks with a number of long-standing practices in conventional journalism, by using unverified information originating from non-standard sources; focussing on opinion rather than fact; and involving ordinary social media users in the interpretation and analysis of unfolding events—and in doing so draws substantially more on social media than news media logic, to the point that it can be described as a "turn against the paradigm of new media normalization" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494). Alternatively, we might say that here journalism is being normalised by social media, reversing the prevalent dynamics of normalisation.

Such emergent practices, largely developed *ad hoc* by Carvin and the journalists assuming similar roles in other breaking news events, therefore "highlight the emergence of new journalistic conventions, which a focus on established journalistic norms alone may fail to identify" (Vis 2013: 43); in such contexts journalism instead becomes a much more fluid and malleable

activity, "flowing and developing between tweets, Live Blogs, other online content and print" (43). Ultimately, in fact, Vis suggests that we might question whether the professional identity of such leading curators as journalists is especially relevant here: it may be more important to focus instead on the journalist's more immediate role "as citizen, bearing witness." The U.K. riots journalists she studied, for instance, acted much like other citizens observing the events and sharing their observations through social media, rather than assuming an inherently unique role as journalists: "they negotiated dangerous situations" and "made themselves less visible as journalists", which enabled "the taking of pictures on small and discrete camera phones" (Vis 2013: 43). And even when journalists and other citizens are not in a position to bear first-hand witness to unfolding acute events, the social curation of event information still retains a significant dimension of "monitory citizenship" (Postill 2015; cf. Keane 2009 on "monitory democracy"): news professionals engaging in an acute event from a distance, like Carvin, arguably do so as concerned citizens at least as much as they do in their formal roles.

It is self-evident that many of the social news curation activities performed by citizens and news professionals during such acute events consist of gatewatching the outputs of a wide variety of news sources, tagging such outputs to enhance their discoverability by attaching hashtags, keywords, and other forms of commentary, and thus publicising these items in order to amplify their visibility and enhance their circulation. Such processes are selective at the level of the individual participant (where we might still speak of each on-sharing choice as representing an act of gatekeeping, too), but these individual information selections result in substantive effects only in aggregate, as larger numbers of participants act *en masse* to validate or counteract each other's selection choices. If in doing so they persistently follow the selections made by specific participating curators, then these curators are thus elevated to greater prominence and influence.

Social News Curation, Social News Framing

The act of selecting, at an individual or collective level, the informational items to be publicised and amplified through sharing and commenting necessarily also represents an assessment of their value to an unfolding news story. This application of news value frameworks may confirm or counteract the value systems utilised by the mainstream media outlets from which a substantial amount of the information circulating through social media continues to

be sourced: social media curators may follow their judgment, or choose instead to highlight alternative perspectives on and interpretations of the same news story; they might also introduce information from non-news sources that extends or contradicts the details covered in mainstream news stories. This contributes to what Papacharissi describes as the emergence of "hybrid news values" that combine "new perspectives on what should be news and how it should be reported with remediations, or reinventions, of typical journalistic practices" (Papacharissi 2014: 43).

Any divergences in the perspectives on a given news event that emerge in the mainstream media and in the social curation processes unfolding on social media ultimately represent disputes over the appropriate framing of the news event, then. "The practice of framing is a persistent feature of social media", as Hogan and Quan-Haase suggest, because "social media allow people to reinterpret culture on the fly" (2010: 312). Such reinterpretation occurs as users find and share information relating to a given issue or topic, and as they observe and reinforce or reject each other's selection choices: what individual users do "carries a signal to their audience" (Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010: 313). Whether such signals rise to prominence depends on their uptake by other participants: in the case of #egypt, for instance, "tweets that were not reproduced in some form drifted into oblivion. By contrast, other tweets were gradually repeated through the processes of subjective pluralism, frequently supported by affective gestures" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). For the most part, Papacharissi suggests, this "subjective pluralism" represented "a process of negotiating frames that was not antagonistic" (Papacharissi 2014: 54). This is perhaps due to the highly distributed and uncoordinated nature of social media streams around major events, where all participants have an equal opportunity to make their contributions, even if only few of these contributions are ever crowdsourced to greater prominence through the repetition and amplification afforded by social curation.

Warner describes very similar dynamics in his reflection on the nature of publics, well before the emergence of the current generation of social media platforms. He suggests that

> public discourse says not only: "Let a public exist," but: "Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way." It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put on a show, and see who shows up. (Warner 2002: 82)

The community of social news curators that emerges around a specific acute event, together with those social media users who simply follow the active social news curation activities of the community and observe the stream of updates that results from them without actively contributing to the curation process, can therefore also be understood as a social media *public* for the event—and it is likely to represent a certain framing of the event, and a certain view of the world in which the event takes place. (We will explore the different possible configurations of social media publics further in Chapter 8.) There are clear parallels here to the first wave of citizen media as we have encountered it in Chapter 2: there, too, specific publics existed around individual citizen journalism sites and news blogs, and around their framing of events from the Seattle WTO summit to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—yet these publics were substantially smaller and more fragmented due to their attachment to individual sites, compared to the potential platform-wide membership base for social media publics.

This more networked and more diverse reservoir of potential participants in the acute event publics and communities that exist in social media spaces also serves to make the processes by which the public's shared frames for the interpretation of news events are developed even more visible, moving them further to the frontstage. As Papacharissi notes, in "conventional newsroom framing practices … backstage negotiation between sources, reporters, editors, and other stakeholders [is] largely not visible to the audience." In #egypt, however, a diverse group of participants interacted "to discursively elevate dominant frames. Ad hoc, emergent framing enabled salient frames to gain stickiness through the networked actions of both elite and crowd" (Papacharissi 2014: 52). Social curation of information around breaking news events can also be described as the social framing of these news events, therefore.

Dominant frames that influence public perceptions of the nature of a breaking news event can certainly emerge from these social framing processes; this is exemplified at the simplest level even just by the hashtags that *Twitter* users might apply to tweets relating to the event:

> hashtags that gain popularity in this bottom-up manner function as a public signal for the ad hoc framing of the event, and as a shorthand cue for enabling the public to understand the thematic frames of an issue as it unfolds in a dynamic fashion. These hashtags that gain widespread adoption thus enact, enable, and sustain the framing of select interpretations, aspects, or frames, to an event over time. (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 144)

Such hashtag selection processes can be disputed, as we have already seen, and may in extreme cases lead to the bifurcation of the publics that gather around a breaking news event into different subsets with widely divergent interpretations of the event, and similarly divergent underlying worldviews, even if continued overlaps between such different publics (for instance through the use of multiple hashtags or the retweeting from one group to the other) are also very likely.

In other cases, especially where the hashtag used remains merely descriptive (as in #egypt or #syria), multiple competing frames may continue to co-exist within the same space, thereby enhancing the diversity of frames and interpretations that social media users are exposed to. Katzenbach describes this as a significant benefit: "conversations in simple publics experience an enhancement through their shift into the mediated space, by placing themselves as alternative options for the interpretation of reality immediately next to journalistic constructions" (Katzenbach 2016: 10, my translation). In concert with the increase in source diversity that we have already encountered as a result of social curation—not least in the curation work of Andy Carvin during the Arab Spring—this increase in frame diversity as a result of social framing substantially increases the multiperspectivality of the news that social media users will encounter as they track breaking news events on *Twitter* or *Facebook*, therefore.

A Cycle of Interaction between Journalistic Reporting and Social Curation

As Heinrich points out, in covering the Arab Spring "Carvin's Twitter reporting is an example of how to maneuver through the sphere of network journalism. Social media, here, are used not only to distribute news, but to gather information, to verify and to knit together many large and small nodes" (Heinrich 2012a: 772). Carvin's ability to position himself as a credible professional voice curating information on the breaking news events of the Arab Spring—in spite of the structural disadvantages that arose from having to track a multitude of divergent sources and views, and from having to do so from a U.S.-based office located far away from the scene of these events—offers an encouraging case study of the influential role that news professionals can continue to play even in an unfamiliar and rapidly transforming media and technological environment. The challenges to journalism that arise from social media—especially in the context of evolving, complex, still unsettled

acute events—are nonetheless profound: "social media allow for new relations that potentially disrupt hierarchical structures and erode the traditional distinction between the producer and consumer of news and information" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 481).

There are a number of elements to this disruption. First, as the examples of Carvin and other news professionals who have become central to social curation efforts during acute events demonstrate, there is a trend towards the recognition of such actors as themselves, rather than as representatives of a larger news organisation. Social media therefore contribute to what Verweij and van Noort describe as a process of individualisation; as a consequence, they suggest, "in public debates and discussion within society the role of the media could decrease in favour of the increasing centrality of individual journalists who have the skills to tell a story on Twitter" (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 110). As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, the journalism industry's response to these developments remains conflicted and contradictory, with some journalists actively pursuing the development of personal brands while elsewhere in the industry strict organisational social media guidelines seek to maintain the primacy of the organisational imprint.

In principle, this development may appear to merely continue a process that began with 24-hour news channels, which afforded increasingly greater visibility and personal recognition to journalists (and other elite actors) acting as commentators and pundits, partly in order to fill the abundant airtime now available with relatively cheap content. From this perspective, the elevation of the social media journalist to the status of a personal brand merely perpetuates "the 'star' system … where news anchors and Pulitzer prize winners can compete for high pay and get considerable autonomy" (Phillips 2015: 80). And indeed, much as the coverage of breaking news in 24-hour news channels often tends to involve journalists interviewing other journalists for their immediate (and often largely fact-free) instant assessment of an event, so too during the Arab Spring did "journalists appear to have a strong preference for retweeting other journalists' content over content from other actor types" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1391). However, it is equally notable that those journalists emerging to prominence as social curators during breaking news events are usually exactly those who engage with a much greater diversity of voices.

A second major element to the disruption from social media, in addition to this effect on the internal hierarchy of the news industry, is how it changes the hierarchy of sources. Social media, with their diverse constituency of active participants, are ill-suited as platforms for the perpetuation of exclusive

elite debates; rather, as we have seen, they offer an open space in which any user is able to state their views, and in which the reach of those views results from a collective but largely uncoordinated process of evaluation and amplification. By contrast, as one of Verweij and van Noort's interviewees in the news industry put it, "in the mainstream media 'you can't allow for debates like this, in which so many different groups of people are heard'" (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 111). This much more diverse mix of expert and inexpert, elite and ordinary sources being compiled in social news curation processes challenges the conventional source selection approaches employed by professional journalists, many of whom prefer to stick with a more exclusive set of elite sources. Again, Andy Carvin serves as a useful counter-example here, and it may be no accident in this context that he did not come from a conventional journalism background himself: "the professional background of the NPR social media strategist is far from the path followed by the traditional foreign correspondent" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494), thus perhaps enabling him to accept unconventional sources more readily as he covered the Arab Spring.

News professionals engaging with a diversity of sources in this way clearly follow Dan Gillmor's mantra that "my readers know more than I do", which we have already encountered in Chapter 2 (Gillmor 2003); "Carvin, himself, has described his Twitter network as 'my editors, researchers & fact-checkers. You're my news room' .... He has said his work is 'another flavor of journalism,' seeing himself as 'another flavor of journalist'" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 495). But as more of the responsibility for the fact-checking, the analysis and evaluation, and ultimately also the framing of a breaking news event is thus passed on from news professionals to the social news curation community—as social media become platforms for the "coconstruction of news by journalists and activists" (483)—, this may also mean that the coverage of acute events on social media platforms moves away from traditional journalistic ideals of objectivity and impartiality. Analysis suggests, for instance, that "in his coverage, Carvin gave a higher priority to the messages from citizens who were expressing their demands for social change, recording and sharing their experiences on Twitter" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 493) than would be expected in ordinary news reporting.

This is a third element to the disruption of journalistic practices in social media contexts, then: as journalists are no longer in control of the framing applied to major breaking news events, the frames that do emerge through social news framing processes may represent a very different perspective on the news. As "news frames are negotiated through crowdsourced practices on

Twitter" (Hermida 2013: 305), in a process that Meraz and Papacharissi describe as "networked framing" (2013: 159), these perspectives may crucially also incorporate a considerably greater affective dimension than mainstream journalistic coverage has traditionally displayed: "we may understand and further interpret collaborative discourses … on Twitter as structures of feeling, comprising an organically developed pattern of impulses, restraints, and tonality" (Papacharissi 2014: 116).

Such greater levels of affect should not be misunderstood as an increase in mere emotion and irrationality, however: an affective connection to the matters at hand may also lead participants to take greater care in constructing the framing of an event, and in testing the assumptions that underlie specific news frames. Indeed, it must be noted, of course, that professional journalists themselves are never entirely free from affect, either, and that this can have both positive and negative consequences:

> when the attacks in the government quarter of Oslo and on the island of Utøya took place [in 2011], Norwegian journalists such as Rune Thomas Ege (@rtege) or Rune Håkonsen (@runehak) curated information on Twitter by using their professional and personal source network—and … some (foreign) journalists might have been better off particularly in the first hours … to rely on these Twitter feeds instead of consulting so-called 'terror-experts' who at times rushed to hasty conclusions about an alleged Al Qaeda attack. (Heinrich 2012a: 773)

The political economy and technical infrastructure of the different media platforms comes to play an important role here: in legacy news media, especially live radio and television, a knee-jerk response to a breaking news story by a leading outlet—for instance, the instant interpretation of a mass killing as Islamist terrorism by a CNN pundit—can set the mainstream media news frame for hours and even days to come, as many other channels will report and adopt this framing by an apparently reputable actor. On social media, on the other hand, the hierarchies of channel and source authority are considerably less fixed and compelling, and it is therefore a great deal more likely that a variety of diverging frames will compete for support while the full facts of the matter are still unclear. Although this "fragmented and pluralized storytelling by crowd-sourcing" (Papacharissi 2014: 48) can be seen as perpetuating uncertainty, such uncertainty is nonetheless actually *preferable* to the false certainty of the TV expert, especially in the early stages of an acute event.

Indeed, the diverse and disputed nature of the coconstructed news frames as they emerge through social framing processes on *Twitter* and *Facebook* is

often also in direct response to the rush to judgment that social media partici-
pants observe in the mainstream media—their offers of alternative interpreta-
tions and frames for the same news event seek to challenge the emerging jour-
nalistic consensus. This underlines that such social media platforms "should
be seen as part of a complex ecosystem in which journalism takes place" (Vis
2013: 44): through their gatewatching activities social media participants
constantly draw into their own debates the reports and interpretations of the
acute event that are gradually becoming available in the mainstream media.
Increasingly, however, information also flows in the opposite direction, not
least because of the role that news professionals now also play in social news
curation activities related to acute events. In this way, social media news cov-
erage and framing processes now also reach back into the mainstream media,
and may come to affect how these media cover an event: "their impact may
reach well beyond the participants themselves" (Smith *et al.* 2014: 1).

This is the fourth disruption to conventional journalistic practices that
social media-based curation of breaking news introduces. Acting again as a
second-tier corrective to the first-tier mainstream media in the sense described
by Herbert Gans (1980: 322), social media accompany the mainstream me-
dia reporting of the event, incorporate its stories into their own information
feeds, but also critique and juxtapose these stories with other available facts;
the news picture and frames that emerge from this collective curation process
in turn also increasingly find their way again into the mainstream, where they
are becoming more and more difficult to ignore. Where there are substantial
differences between the professional and citizen journalistic interpretations
of the facts of the story, therefore, mainstream news outlets are now forced
to defend or adjust their analysis and framing: they can no longer ignore the
curation processes that take place in social media platforms, nor dismiss the
participants in such social news curation as amateurs and partisans—not least
also because their own journalists are now often also themselves engaged in
those curation efforts.

This further demonstrates the considerable interconnections between
mainstream and social media, which facilitate increasingly voluminous in-
formation flows between the two sides, unfolding in several cycles across the
same breaking news event. We have already seen how social media content
from citizens acting as eyewitnesses is now regularly incorporated into news
coverage as news about acute events breaks—"the news itself may emerge first
via Twitter, but it is the mass media that pick it up and package it for a mass
audience" (Newman 2011: 56). Even as early as the Mumbai attacks in 2008,

tweets from witnesses were thus widely reported in the mainstream media, and "photos from the scene filled Flickr and showed up on newspaper sites and TV screens" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.). But there is also a kind of secondary eyewitnessing that emerges in response to the first mainstream media reports: as the Mumbai attacks were reported, for instance, "on Flickr we also saw screenshots from TV screens" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.).

Similar phenomena have been observed in many other breaking news events since then; in the view of Vis *et al.*, "this image production suggests the value of this simultaneous, removed eyewitnessing" (Vis *et al.* 2014: 395) as a mechanism through which even those social media users who are not physically present on the scene may demonstrate their immediate involvement:

> what is documented in the photograph is partly the status of the image-maker as a media spectator. Here, the eyewitness is both a spectator of mainstream media news and an image-maker who utilises the camera phone as a communication-connection device to produce images and distribute them through Twitter. (Vis *et al.* 2014: 395)

The sharing of mainstream media screenshots also represents a first step in the gatewatching of mainstream media reports relating to the news story; indeed, the sharing of such screenshots from live TV through social media platforms could also be interpreted as the only option available to would-be gatewatchers in the very early stages of a breaking news event, when more easily shareable news stories have not been published online yet. More conventional forms of gatewatching—finding, commenting on, and sharing links to online news content, and re-sharing the content posted by other social media users—then commence as news content become available online.

As such more standard gatewatching begins, and as social curation processes emerge, social media users constantly draw in additional material from the media (as well as from other original sources), evaluate that content and engage in their own social framing activities, which—as we have seen—may result in very different perspectives on the news than those presented in the mainstream media. In turn, also because of the growing involvement of mainstream journalists in such processes, the outcomes from such ongoing social curation processes are then also likely to find their way again into the mainstream media, so that a potentially continuous back-and-forth process of cross-platform interactions begins to unfold. However, this interaction should not necessarily be understood as a process of agenda-setting, in either direction: "it is not that the journalists see that a story is 'big on Twitter' and then mechanically produce additional stories for the wire or broadcast", as Neuman

et al. point out. Rather, both social media "crowds and … professional journalists are reacting to a shared perception that an event is significant and each [are] responding according to [their] own natural dynamic" (2014: 204).

For all the justified attention to the role of social media in breaking news situations, then, such platforms are not necessarily undermining the mainstream media in the context of acute events; rather, they are interweaving with them. As Newman notes, "even Keith Urbahn, who posted that first tweet [about the killing of Osama Bin Laden], was moved to defend the role of mainstream media when he later revealed via Twitter that his source was actually a well-connected TV producer from the mainstream media—not a political insider" (Newman 2011: 32). Commonly, then, as news breaks social media are "getting the ball rolling and stimulating interest", but key aspects of the news are "still delivered in a fairly traditional way" (32b). At the same time, however, that role in rapidly disseminating the first information about a breaking news event—and in so doing reaching social networks that otherwise may not yet have been aware of the fact that a major acute event has occurred—should not be underestimated: "it is likely that Twitter users serve as important *multipliers for spreading information* communicated via the network to other channels" (Neuberger, vom Hofe, and Nuernbergk 2014: 346).

Reintermediating the News: A First Draft of the Present

Throughout this chapter, what we have observed is the role of *Twitter* in rapidly assembling *ad hoc* publics around breaking news stories—publics which are defined by their shared efforts to gather, evaluate, selectively amplify, and in so doing curate the picture of a breaking news event as it emerges in real time. Hermida describes this as a "disintermediation of news", which in the process is also "undermining the gatekeeping function of journalists" (Hermida 2010b: 300). Especially as acute events unfold, it is becoming evident that journalism is no longer in control of the news stories it is attempting to tell, but that professional journalists, much like ordinary social media users, are now forced merely to hang on during the twists and turns delivered by an ever more dynamic news environment in which a wide array of sources, news outlets, and other news actors are contributing information. Social media, and especially *Twitter*, are now commonly the core space through which all of these actors interconnect: this is not exactly a process of complete *disintermediation*, as these

platforms are also media and through their affordances affect how information may flow, but it is an important form of *reintermediation* that diverts important news processes away from the conventional channels of the mainstream media—a point which we will address further in the next chapter.

In this changing environment, this reintermediation means that journalism no longer holds the unchallenged privilege of presenting "a first rough draft of history", as the old saying goes (see Shafer 2010): that is, a first working interpretation of news events and their relevance to the public. The real-time coverage and curation of acute events on social media, which outdoes conventional journalism in its speed and its ability to present a number of immediate reflections on the impact of unfolding events, instead positions it as what we might describe as "a first draft of the present" (Bruns and Weller 2016). The informational record created in this process may come to be of a historical importance that is as great as that of conventional news reports has proven to be: "now, for the most time in recorded history, witnesses to news events are able to post their unmediated testimonies as events unfold, in real time. These will remain permanently accessible to anyone, anywhere with uncontrolled Internet access" (Ahmad 2010: 152), at least as long as the social media platforms and their archives remain operational.

Viewed from this angle, the social curation of information about acute events that is performed by social media users as these events unfold also holds significance well beyond the present moment. In #egypt and elsewhere, "as individuals tweeted and retweeted observations, events instantly turned into stories" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 274), and these stories become a window on the world in which the events unfolded that is invaluable not only for making sense of the news at the time, but also for future historians looking back on how affected locals and the wider world reacted to what was taking place. This bigger, longer-term perspective underlines just how apt the term social news curation is as a description for the activities undertaken by social media users: "engaging in curatorial activities is a way of being a steward of our history by deciding what and how to preserve this history for posterity's sake" (Liu 2010: 22). In compiling their first rough draft of history, journalists have long played a powerful role in defining current events for future audiences; now, the collective responses of social media publics (to the extent that they are preserved for posterity) generate a similar and even more rich and immediate historical resource.

Overall, then, in this transformed media environment the work of professional, industrial journalists is now thoroughly interleaved with the activities

of a wide array of other actors. What emerges from this reintermediation are a range of journalism practices (performed by professional journalists, expert para-journalists, and self-selecting citizen journalists alike) that take advantage of this interconnected, networked informational space itself—practices that Beckett has described as networked journalism:

> Networked Journalism allows the public to be involved in every aspect of journalism production through crowd-sourcing, interactivity, hyper-linking, user-generated content and forums. It changes the creation of news from being linear and top-down to a collaborative process. (Beckett 2010: 1)

Such changes are by no means universally accepted, as we will see over the coming chapters: in particular, there are concerns "that new practices undermine traditional journalistic values, such as accuracy and objectivity" (Gulyas 2013: 272). A range of significant journalistic errors related to the difficulties in balancing the speed of social media reporting with the need for the thorough verification of information, in particular, have led some journalists and journalism scholars to sound an important note of caution about the impact of this reintermediation of the news through social media (see e.g. Neuberger, vom Hofe, and Nuernbergk 2014: 346). As Hermida has pointed out, "there are few signs that journalism has, as a profession, embraced the notion of sharing jurisdiction over the news and over the process of verification"; instead, journalists and news organisations continue to use social media in "opportunistic" fashion, drawing on the information circulated through social media without fully embracing the more participatory, networked logics of social media (Hermida 2012: 664).

In part this is because journalists—already stretched in their work because of the increasing pressures of working in an industry that is struggling to remain economically viable—are simply overwhelmed by the added demands of incorporating social media into their work practices: "for journalists working with Twitter, the velocity at which information is circulated creates significant demands in the realm of verification" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1196; cf. Heinrich 2012b: 61). Social media could be part of the solution as much as they are part of the problem here, however: as journalists become more familiar with the social media environments in which they work, they might also begin to develop a stronger sense of the important voices on which they might draw, and of the collective curation processes that could help them verify emerging information. This, too, would be a process of normalisation, though—in contrast to how the citizen media of

the first wave were normalised by the industry—not simply on the terms of the journalists. It would mean a shift from the opportunistic, tactical use of social media in breaking news contexts to a more persistent, strategic utilisation of social media as a media environment that enables journalists to constantly keep an eye on current events in the world, thus using social media as what Hermida describes as an ambient "awareness system" for the news (Hermida 2010b: 300).

As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, a growing number of individual journalists and news organisations are now beginning to explore these opportunities. Yet even while that adoption of social media into journalistic practice still continues to unfold, it has already become obvious that in the context of acute events social media enable the engagement of a much wider range of actors in the immediate eyewitnessing, selective repetition, and social curation of news and information that may variously be sourced from affected bystanders, original sources, journalistic reportage, or social media platforms themselves. Gatewatching (both of external sources whose content is injected into the spaces of social media, and of existing social media content that is further amplified through reposting) is crucial to these processes: on the one hand, the collective efforts by hundreds and thousands of social media users to share the news and information from a variety of sources that they deem to be relevant to a current acute event means that

> Twitter becomes a system where news is reported, disseminated and shared online in short, fast and frequent messages. It creates an ambient media system that displays abstracted information in a space occupied by the user. In this system, … the value does not lie in each individual fragment of news and information, but rather in the mental portrait created by a number of messages over a period of time. (Hermida 2010b: 301)

On the other hand, the constant recirculating of available information by retweeting and sharing past messages, performed especially by the majority of participating users who do not have privileged access to new first-hand news and information from external sources, ensures that such material remains visible once posted. This is crucial in the context of the interface design of *Twitter* and similar platforms: "unlike horizontal stock or sports tickers that communicate incremental changes in prices and scores in a constant loop, Twitter's vertical ticker relies upon friends and contacts to actively repost or 'retweet' a post back to the top of its vertical-ticker interface" (Elmer 2013: 19). Each individual act of gatewatching, however small, makes the pieces of information it highlights a little less ambient, and instead serves to

bring them further to the conscious attention of social media users who follow these streams of social news curation.

We might ask whether such activity can thus be understood as a form of citizen journalism, echoing "similar debates around blogs and whether blogging was journalism" (Hermida 2013: 296) that unfolded during the first wave of citizen media. Certainly, there is now a very broad citizen involvement in the coverage of acute events on social media, and that involvement is crucial as only this large-scale engagement ensures that breaking news events are amplified enough to become reliably visible to a large range of social media users, as well as to the trending topics algorithms that also help to alert users to important topics. Such citizen involvement is aided by the fact that social media have further lowered the barriers for ordinary users to participate in breaking news events, to a significant degree: basic involvement may now simply mean pressing the retweet button on *Twitter*, or a 'Share This' button on a mainstream news site, but in aggregate even—and *especially*—such simple actions contribute substantially to the collective social curation process, and result in a crowdsourced evaluation of the importance of the overall story and its individual informational components. This bears out Benkler's point that

> granularity … sets the smallest possible individual investment necessary to participate in a project. … If the finest-grained contributions are relatively large and would require a large investment of time and effort, the universe of potential contributors decreases. A successful large-scale peer-production project must therefore have a predominate portion of its modules be relatively finegrained. (2006: 101)

Twitter, and most other social media platforms, render the available options for user participation in breaking news engagement very fine-grained indeed.

Arguably, this means that—even if we consider only the special case of public engagement in breaking news events, rather than a broader range of news—user engagement in this second wave of citizen media is already shaping up to be considerably more widespread than it was during the first wave. If user involvement starts with the click of a share or retweet button and progresses in comparatively small increments towards more persistent and original activity, such greater ease of access and participation may in turn also mean that a larger and more diverse range of users are now able and prepared to contribute, well beyond the 'political junkies' of the heyday of blogging. This broader range of participants may no longer consider themselves to be citizen journalists, however; they may not be driven by a profound desire to 'become the media' in order to address significant shortcomings in the ex-

isting mainstream news industry. Instead, they simply share the news, more or less attentively, as acute events occur that attract their attention—but it is precisely in this broadening of the contributor base for gatewatching and newssharing that the second wave of citizen media advances substantially beyond the first.

At the same time, "excited claims about technology-driven 'revolutions' risk obscuring what is really happening, especially where the impact of technological change is overstated as a sudden, prodigious departure from previous convention" (Allan 2013: 170). In spite of the widespread recognition of *Twitter*, in particular, as well as of other social media platforms as increasingly crucial tools in the coverage of breaking news events, they do also simply constitute the next step in an evolution that can be traced back at least to *Indymedia*'s 'Battle of Seattle', and from there through the role of blogs in covering major natural disasters, political scandals, national elections, and other important news events to the present moment. Central throughout this evolution has been the practice of gatewatching, as we have seen—the current generation of social media have merely made this practice available to an even greater constituency of users, who are now able to engage in it in real time, and bring to it an even broader set of perspectives. As Jarvis put it in the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, then, "such will be our new view of news: urgent, live, direct, emotional, personal" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.).

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